

PREVENTING FLOPPY DISK DATA CORRUPTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to the prevention of data corruption on computers containing flawed Floppy Diskette Controller chips.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The Intel 8272A floppy-disk controller (FDC) and it's compatibles (for example, the NEC 765A) are not capable of detecting a direct memory access (DMA) underrun condition on the last byte of a write operation. This problem occurs in systems that: 1) use DMA to transfer data; and, 2) allow the floppy disk controller to be preempted by a DMA channel with higher priority. When this preemption causes the system to fail to respond to a floppy DMA request for more than 14 μ S, possibly erroneous data is written to the floppy. This problem is compounded by the fact that by not responding in under 14 μ S, the system does not detect that the data written to the floppy may be erroneous.. This problem is further detailed in United States Patent number 5,379,414 issued to Adams and titled "SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR FDC ERROR DETECTION AND PREVENTION" and is hereby incorporated herein by reference for all that it discloses.

[0003] Since the writing of erroneous data may cause files on the floppy to be lost or seriously corrupted, there is a need in the art for solutions that either detect, or prevent the writing of erroneous data to a floppy disk.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] DMA requests generated by the floppy-disk controller are responded to in less than 14 μ S. DMA requests from at least one DMA channel with a higher priority than the floppy-disk controller are disabled for at least a portion of a write to floppy DMA operation that includes the transfer of the last byte. This helps ensure that DMA requests generated by the floppy-disk controller will be responded to in under 14 μ S preventing an undetected underrun condition on systems with flawed floppy disk controllers from occurring.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] FIG. 1 is a flowchart illustrating steps that mask requests from DMA channels with a higher priority than the floppy disk during an entire floppy disk write operation.

[0006] FIG. 2 is a flowchart illustrating steps that help allow the timer interrupt service routine monitor a floppy disk write operation.

[0007] FIG. 3 is a flowchart illustrating steps that end the timer interrupt service routine's monitoring of a floppy disk writer operation.

[0008] FIG. 4 is a flowchart illustrating steps that mask requests from DMA channels with a higher priority than the floppy disk during a portion of the floppy disk write operation.

[0009] FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating steps that calculate an estimate of when to mask requests from DMA channels with a higher priority than the floppy disk and then mask those requests at the appropriate time.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0010] In one embodiment, the requests from DMA channels with a higher priority are disabled for the entire write to floppy DMA operation. In another embodiment, an estimate of when the last byte of a write to floppy DMA operation is going to be transferred is made. This estimate is used to disable the interrupts from DMA channels with a higher priority than the floppy-disk controller for a window of time around the transfer of the last byte of a write. This estimate may be based upon a fixed interval from the start of the write operation. This estimate may also be based upon readings taken from the byte counter of the DMA controller and the system timer. A threshold byte count or an interpolated time value based upon the rate the byte count is changing may be used to as an estimate based upon readings taken from the byte counter.

[0011] FIG. 1 is a flowchart illustrating steps that mask requests from DMA channels with a higher priority than the floppy disk during an entire floppy disk write operation. In FIG. 1, the process starts at the entry point to the floppy disk driver, **102**. After step **102**, in a step **104**, if the command given to the floppy disk driver is a write command, flow proceeds to step **106**. If the command given to the floppy disk driver is not a write command, flow proceeds to step **108**. In a step **106**, the DMA channels that have higher priority than the floppy disk DMA channel are masked. This prevents those channels from preempting the DMA transfers from memory to the FDC. Since the FDC will now have the highest unmasked DMA priority, other DMA

channels cannot preempt the FDC DMA requests thereby preventing the FDC DMA requests from being responded to in less than 14 μ S. Masking of the DMA channels with higher priority than the floppy disk is done by writing certain mask bits into a control register of a DMA controller chip. Flow then proceeds to step 108.

[0012] In a step 108, the rest of the floppy disk driver routine executes. This step includes all of the processes and steps normally executed by the floppy disk driver routine to control, read, write, etc. the floppy disk, the FDC, and the DMA controller chip. After the rest of the floppy disk driver routine completes, flow proceeds to step 110.

[0013] In a step 110, if the command given to the floppy disk driver was a write command, flow proceeds to step 112. If the command given to the floppy disk driver was not a write command, flow proceeds to step 114. In a step 112, the DMA channel masks are restored to what they were before step 106. Normally, all the channels would be unmasked before step 106 and after step 112. If for some reason, one or more of the DMA channels that were masked in step 106 had its requests being masked before step 106, this mask would be restored. DMA channels with lower priority than the floppy disk may or may not be left unaltered by step 106 therefore they may or may not be restored by step 112 to a masked or unmasked status. After step 112 flow proceeds to step 114. Step 114 represents the exit point of the floppy disk driver routine.

[0014] FIG. 2 is a flowchart illustrating steps that help allow the timer interrupt service routine monitor a floppy disk write operation. . In FIG. 2, the process starts at the entry point to the floppy disk driver, 202. After step 202, in a step 204, if the command given to the floppy disk driver is a write command, flow proceeds to step 206. If the command given to the floppy disk driver is not a write command, flow

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proceeds to step 210. In a step 206, the timer interrupt service routine is modified.

After step 206, in a step 208, the timer is reprogrammed to interrupt the processor at a rapid rate. The modification of step 206 and reprogramming of step 208 allows monitoring of DMA process during the timer interrupt service routine so that the DMA channels with higher priority may be masked at an appropriately chosen time. Flow then proceeds to the rest of the floppy disk driver routine as represented by step 210.

[0015] FIG. 3 is a flowchart illustrating steps that end the timer interrupt service routine's monitoring of a floppy disk writer operation. In FIG. 3, the process starts at the exit point to the floppy disk driver, 302. After step 302, in a step 304, if the command given to the floppy disk driver is a write command, flow proceeds to step 306. If the command given to the floppy disk driver is not a write command, flow proceeds to step 310. In a step 306, the timer is reprogrammed to interrupt the processor at a normal rate. After step 306, in a step 308, the timer interrupt service routine may be restored to its original set of steps that it used before being modified by step 206 shown in FIG. 2. Flow then proceeds to exit the floppy disk driver routine as represented by step 310.

[0016] FIG. 4 is a flowchart illustrating steps that mask requests from DMA channels with a higher priority than the floppy disk during a portion of the floppy disk write operation. In FIG. 4, the process starts at the entry point to the timer interrupt service routine, 402. After entry into the timer interrupt service routine 402 the DMA byte count is read in a step 404. Typically this would be done by reading a register in the DMA controller. After step 404, in a step 406, if the DMA byte count has reached a threshold value flow proceeds to a step 408. If the DMA byte count has not reached a threshold value, flow proceeds to step 410. In a step 408, the DMA channels that

have higher priority than the floppy disk DMA channel are masked. This prevents those channels from preempting the DMA transfers from memory to the FDC. Since the FDC will now have the highest unmasked DMA priority, other DMA channels cannot preempt the FDC DMA requests thereby preventing the FDC DMA requests from being responded to in less than 14 μ S. Masking of the DMA channels with higher priority than the floppy disk is done by writing certain mask bits into a control register of a DMA controller chip. By waiting until a threshold byte count in the DMA process before masking DMA requests, this method has less impact on the system than the method illustrated in FIG. 1.

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[0017] Flow then proceeds to step 410. In a step 410, the rest of the timer interrupt service routine executes. This step includes all of the processes and steps normally executed by the timer interrupt service routine.

[0018] FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating steps that calculate an estimate of when to mask requests from DMA channels with a higher priority than the floppy disk and then mask those requests at the appropriate time. In FIG. 5, the process starts at the entry point to the timer interrupt service routine, **502**. After entry into the timer interrupt service routine **502**, in a step **512**, if it has been determined when the DMA channels should be masked flow proceeds to step **514**. If it has not been determined when the DMA channels should be masked, flow proceeds to step **504**. In a step **504** the DMA byte count and an indication of time are read and included in a calculation of an estimate of when the last byte of the DMA will be transferred. The indication of time may be in a variety of forms including clock ticks, seconds and milliseconds, or any other form that is obtainable. Typically the DMA byte count is obtained by reading a register in the DMA controller. The calculation of the estimate of when the

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last byte of the DMA will be transferred may be done in a number of ways including:
linear interpolation, least squares fit method, or other curve fitting methods.

[0019] After step **504**, in a step **506**, if a threshold number of DMA byte count/time pairs have been included in the calculation of the estimate of when the last byte of the DMA will be transferred, flow proceeds to step **508**. If the threshold number has not been included, flow proceeds to step **510**. A threshold number is used to ensure that a minimum number of byte count/time pairs are included to provide sufficient accuracy and provide for any minimum number of pairs required by the curve fitting method chosen.

[0020] In a step **508**, a time is calculated after which the DMA channels should be masked. This time is based upon the estimate of when the last byte of the DMA channel will be transferred. One way to calculate when the DMA channels should be masked is to subtract a predetermined amount of time from the estimate of when last byte will be transferred. Other ways may also be used. After step **508**, flow proceeds to step **510** which represents the rest of the timer interrupt service routine. This step includes all of the processes and steps normally executed by the timer interrupt service routine.

[0021] In a step **514**, if the DMA mask time has arrived, flow proceeds to step **516**. If the DMA mask time has not arrived, flow proceed to step **510**. In step **516**, the DMA channels that have higher priority than the floppy disk DMA channel are masked. This prevents those channels from preempting the DMA transfers from memory to the FDC. Since the FDC will now have the highest unmasked DMA priority, other DMA channels cannot preempt the FDC DMA requests thereby preventing the FDC DMA requests from being responded to in less than $14 \mu\text{S}$. Masking of the DMA channels with higher priority than the floppy disk is done by

writing certain mask bits into a control register of a DMA controller chip. By basing the time to mask DMA request upon an estimate of the time the last byte will be transferred, this method may have less impact on the system than other methods.

[0022] Although several specific embodiments of the invention have been described and illustrated, the invention is not to be limited to the specific forms or arrangements so described and illustrated. The invention is limited only by the claims.

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